

GOING GREEN

By David Tristram

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

SET DESIGN

This play calls for several different locations. I've deliberately not prescribed the set layout too rigidly. All venues are different, and there are many ways of making the multi-purpose area work for you. If in doubt, the best answer is usually to keep it very simple. Basic, functional table surfaces and chairs – preferably painted black – are far more chameleon-like than distinctive or over-dressed areas, and they disappear more readily when the spotlight is not on them.

For the main arena, just use a modern, stylish sofa or seating area plus a side-table or two for props. The audience will soon accept the convention of minimalist suggestion, so that a hospital office can become a home with a flick of a light or the addition of a simple accessory.

If you have the luxury of adding split level areas with extra staging units, do so, but it's not essential. And never let scene changes hold up the pace of the story-telling.

OPENING AND CLOSING MUSIC

The script suggests a specially-recorded version of "John Brown's Body" to open and close the play. This is not essential, but a free custom-made track is available. Email david@comedyconnection.co.uk

I'm also a fan of using subtle underscores, just as any TV or movie production would, so feel free to experiment with incidental music to underpin and enhance the mood of certain scenes. Used judiciously, it can totally transform important moments.

CASTING

All casting is important, but in **Going Green** the roles of Madeleine and John in particular are quite challenging, and will need the skill of your most experienced performers. This is a comedy, but a bitter-sweet one, and its success relies upon engaging the emotions of the audience on many levels.

Oh, almost forgot. The actor playing John also needs to be willing to "go green". There is suitable body paint out there. Have fun.



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Cover Design: Emma Tristram
Cover Illustration: Kelly Jackson

The Characters:

Sir Clive

Head of the British Secret Service.
Sophisticated, with a commanding presence.

Madeleine

“A medical professional.”
Intelligent, charismatic, engaging, passionate.

John

A politician.
Similar age and characteristics to Madeleine.

Brian

Chairman of the Party
A bluff, no-nonsense “old school” politician.

Laura

John’s girlfriend.
Attractive physically, but shallow and self-centred.

Christine

Brian’s wife.
Good natured and likeable but not overly bright.

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by DAVID TRISTRAM

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ACT ONE

The stage is minimalistic and multi-purpose. To one side of the main area, or better still at the back on a higher staging level, is a separate area, with a small square interview table and two chairs.

Play-in music is a specially-recorded acoustic version of John's Brown's Body (see Director's notes).

*"John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave,
John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave,
But his truth keeps marching on.*

*Glory, glory, hallelujah,
Glory, glory, hallelujah, (etc)
His truth keeps marching on."*

The interview area is spot-lit. On the table are a telephone and a device for recording interviews. Madeleine stands waiting. She is clearly anxious and tense. Sir Clive enters.

Sir Clive: Madeleine.

Madeleine: Sir Clive - thank you for seeing me. I know how busy you must be...

Sir Clive: No, no - my pleasure. Please. (*He beckons her to sit*) Have you been offered tea?

Madeleine: I'm fine, thank you.

Sir Clive: So - how can I help?

Madeleine: What would help most me right now is...well, for you to just sit and listen...for a while - if that's okay.

Sir Clive: Fire away.

Madeleine: I'm afraid it's a long story.

Sir Clive: I'm sitting comfortably.

Madeleine: (*pointing to the device on the table*) Sorry - does that record interviews?

Sir Clive: Don't worry, it's not on.

Madeleine: I'd prefer if it were. Do you mind?

Sir Clive: (*slightly bemused*) Not at all - if that's what you want. (*He pushes the record button*) Okay, we're rolling. Take it from the top.

Madeleine: Well, I suppose it all started at the party conference about five years ago.

John was a bit of a high-flyer in the Green Party - you know, tipped for the top. And it was just at the time when public sensibilities were starting to shift. We'd had the expenses scandals. The bankers. The riots. People were losing faith in the political establishment. And then there were the disasters - the oil leaks, the Japanese nuclear plants, the Tsunamis. It was inevitable The Greens would pick up some of the disenchanted electorate - anyone with a bit of a green conscience, and nowhere else to go. So the timing was right. It just needed the right platform. And someone with a bit of charisma to articulate the message. John Brown was that man...

Atmospheric cheering fades up under her words as we go back in time. The spotlight fades on the interview area and up on John Brown, who is stood at a lectern, coming to the climax of a stirring speech.

John: Be in no doubt, the procrastinating politicians, and the bumbling bureaucrats of Kyoto have failed us. They have failed us in the most spectacular fashion. But this is no longer about us. This is now about our children. And our children's children. It is about securing the very survival of the magnificent, mysterious, magical planet we are privileged to call home. So I have a message for the procrastinating politicians, and the bumbling bureaucrats. It is a very simple, stark message. Go green, or die. Yes, it is as simple as that. Go green, or die. There is no third option. And it is a message which we must deliver - because if we do not, then surely no-one else will. Go green, or die. We must hear it echo on every street corner, in every home, in every pub, club and shop, in every boardroom, in every school, in every corridor of power - until the argument is won.

Cheers and clapping.

But, friends and colleagues, we have a dilemma. Because this party must never be labelled as the party of despair. It must be, and is, the party of hope. And so I have second message. A message just as important as the first. And we must deliver it with equal vigour, and with equal fortitude. My second message is simply this. Green is the new gold. Why? Because green is the currency with which we shall secure not just our survival, but our future economic prosperity. With new opportunities for enterprise, exciting new technologies, new jobs, new hope. Ladies and Gentlemen, the future's bright. The future...is green. Thank you.

Wildly enthusiastic applause and cheering, as John takes a glass of water and leaves the lectern. Brian takes his place.

Brian: John Brown everyone. Brilliant. Thank you, John. Well, you'll be glad to know I'm not even going to try and follow that, so that's it for today - coffee's being served just outside in the foyer - thank you all for your time, and have a safe journey home.

Brian makes his way from the lectern to John, who is sipping water, and gives him an excited slap on the back. As they speak, conference 'stage crew' remove the lectern.

John: Was it okay?

Brian: No, it wasn't okay – it was bloody brilliant. You've put the green agenda right back on every boardroom table in Britain. There's no way those buggers can bury their heads in the sand now.

John: Well, glad to have done my bit.

Brian: More than a bit, John. After a performance like that, well...I don't want to count anybody's chickens, but between you, me and the gatepost, I think you've just nailed the leadership.

John: Yeah, I need to talk to you about that.

Brian: Did you see the TV cameras? If that makes the national news - and it will - you'll walk it.

John: I'm not going for leader, Brian.

Brian: (*stunned*) What?

John: I've decided to pull out.

Brian: Don't be bloody daft - you're a nailed-on certainty. You're head and shoulders above anyone else.

John: Well, nevertheless.

Brian: But...this is what you've always wanted.

John: The timings not right.

Brian: It's never been more right. Like you said - green is gold, I'm telling you. Everybody wants a piece of us. The party's flying up the polls. (*He grabs a newspaper from a table*) Here...look at this - seventeen percent. Seventeen bloody percent! You know what that means? It means nobody can win this election without us. And you're the stand-out candidate. Play this right and you'll end up with a ministerial post in the next coalition Government - or better. If this momentum keeps up, this time next year you could be Prime Minister.

John: You always were ambitious, Brian.

Brian: Look, it's my job as Chairman of this party to find the best leader. And I've found him.

John: The answer's still no. Sorry.

Brian: Is this anything to do with that new girlfriend of yours?

John: No, no. Laura knows nothing of this. No, this is my decision. And it's final.

Brian: Well. I'm shocked. And disappointed.

John: What about Derek for leader?

Brian: Derek's an arse. He's a ditherer. Can you imagine Derek in front of Paxman?

John: No.

Brian: No.

John: What about Kate?

Brian: Kate's a woman, John.

John: If I didn't know you better, Brian, I might interpret that as another of your infamous sexist remarks.

Brian: Don't give me all that PC crap. Look, we both know that men only buy the green argument when it's out of the mouths of other men. When it's about tough choices - life, death, petrol engines, nuclear. When a woman starts banging on about it, it doesn't work - not for men. It just sounds like they're being nagged about doing the recycling. It reminds them too much of home.

John: Ever the pragmatic politician.

Brian: And I don't take no for an answer. So, come on, let's move on to phase two of the persuasion process.

John: What's that?

Brian: Put down your water, I'm going to buy you a proper drink.

John: No thanks.

Brian: What? First he turns down the leadership, now he's refusing a drink? You're not John Brown. You're some sort of bloody alien imposter.

John: I've just got another appointment that's all.

Brian: Not another consultancy? You must be raking it in. Hope you're not consorting with the enemy.

John: No, no. It's erm...well, it's a hospital appointment.

Brian: Oh. Nothing serious I hope.

John: Well...

Brian: John?

John: Quite probably, yes.

Brian: John - what the hell?

John: Let's leave it.

Brian: Is this something to do with why you don't want to stand?

John: Look, Brian - you're a good mate, but I'm not in the mood to talk about it right now, if that's okay.

Brian: Of course.

John: I just need to...well, I'll find out soon enough.

Brian: Shit John, why didn't you say something - you could have cancelled today.

John: No. No, I wanted to do it. I needed something to keep me occupied. It's fine, honestly. I'll er...well, I'd better go.

He leaves, as Brian looks on anxiously. Lights fade back to the interview desk.

Sir Clive: So he didn't tell the Chairman exactly what was wrong.

Madeleine: No. Not at that stage. To be fair he didn't really know then. I mean, he knew it was something serious, but...

Sir Clive: Okay, so he's said he doesn't want the leadership, hinted there's a health issue - then what?

Madeleine: Well, that's when he first came to see me.

A ripple of music as the spotlight switches to the central area. John, clearly bewildered and worried, stands waiting. Madeleine moves to the main arena. It features minimal furnishing – a simple modern office sofa or chairs, and a side-table or two for props.

Madeleine: Mr Brown. I'm Madeleine Gascoigne.

They shake hands.

John: You're not the man I saw before.

Madeleine: Glad you spotted that. I'm a woman.

John: Yes. Sorry.

Madeleine: No, I'm sorry. Not really a good time for idle quips. So, has the nurse done the blood sample?

John: Yes. But I thought you'd done all your tests.

Madeleine: We have, but we like to track any changes. Anyway - just been watching you on the telly.

John: Really?

Madeleine: Channel Four news. You were very good.

John: Thanks.

Madeleine: You certainly get my vote.

John: Right now I'm more interested in your test results.

Madeleine: Fair enough. Look, erm...well, no point beating around the bush - do you want the bad news, or the possible good news?

John: I've been preparing myself all week for the bad news.

Madeleine: Right.

John: How bad is it?

Madeleine: Not good.

John: Hence the word 'bad'.

Madeleine: Indeed.

John: Great. All right, go for it.

Madeleine: Well, I'm afraid it is, as we suspected, a very rare and very aggressive form of the disease. And I'm duty bound as a medical professional to tell you that the prognosis is...poor.

John: Poor.

Madeleine: Very poor. I'm sorry.

John: (*deep breath*) Well. Thank you for your honesty.

Madeleine: Can I get you something – a drink or something?

John: Have you got brandy?

Madeleine: No. Sorry.

John: Look...I need all the help I can get right now. You mentioned something about some possible good news.

Madeleine: Yes. This disease, as I said – very new, and very rare. You're only the third person ever to be diagnosed with it.

John: Oh. Lucky me.

Madeleine: So rare in fact, that well, no-one's doing any research on it. I mean there's nothing in it for the drugs companies. It's pretty much...uncharted territory.

John: Remind me - this is the good news, right?

Madeleine: Well, yes and no. I'm afraid the...possible good news does come with some...bad news.

John: Brilliant. So the bad news is terrible and the good news comes with an extra helping of bad news.

Madeleine: That's a fair assessment.

John: Water.

Madeleine: What?

John: I'll have a glass of water.

Madeleine: (*passing him a glass of water a table*) Oh, right. There you go.

John: Thanks.

Madeleine: So, I said that no-one's doing any research on this. Not quite true. There is one person. Me.

John: You?

Madeleine: Not much to look at, I know, but I'm considered to be the leading authority on this. Well, pretty much the only authority on this at the moment. That's why I'm here.

John: Go on.

Madeleine: I've been doing some interesting tests lately, using...this stuff. (*She produces a small sample bottle with a bright green substance in it*)

John: What is it?

Madeleine: *Panellus stipticus*, commonly known as the bitter oyster. Not sure why, it's not an oyster at all - it's a naturally-occurring fungus. Take a look.

John: (*taking the bottle*) It's glowing.

Madeleine: Yes, it's bioluminescent. It has some other interesting properties too. It can de-toxify certain environmental pollutants. And it can act as an astringent - to help stop bleeding. But the property I'm most interested in, is its appetite.

John: Appetite?

Madeleine: Yes. It particularly seems to like the rogue cells which are causing your illness. Swallow this stuff, the spores find their way into the blood stream and it sniffs them out, hunts them down...and, well, eats them.

John: (*muted, mesmerised by the liquid*) Wow.

Madeleine: Now, let me emphasize - this isn't a cure, or anything like one. But the tests I've done so far seem to show that it could help keep the disease at bay.

John: This is in danger of starting to sound like good news.

Madeleine: Yes, well, don't get too carried away. I'm afraid my test results do have a couple of...issues.

John: I'm listening.

Madeleine: Okay. Issue number one, I've only ever conducted my tests on mice.

John: Mice.

Madeleine: And rats.

John: In case you hadn't noticed, I'm not a rodent.

Madeleine: No. And that's why we have to be careful – it's notoriously difficult to scale up these things successfully. But I have just received permission from the medical council to conduct a preliminary test...on a willing human.

John: Ah. And you want me to be the willing human.

Madeleine: Yes.

John: (*pause and deep breath*) Well, I suppose it's a no-brainer.

Madeleine: Not quite.

John: Why?

Madeleine: Okay, here comes the bad news part of the good news...

John: I thought I'd already had that.

Madeleine: Really?

John: The rats and mice thing?

Madeleine: No, that wasn't it.

John: Oh, there's worse to come...can't wait.

Madeleine: There are two potential stumbling blocks. The main one of course is...that it simply might not work. It's never been...

John: ...tested on humans, yes I got that. And the other?

Madeleine: The other is a side-effect.

John: Which is?

Madeleine: (*she sighs, then answers reluctantly*) Changing colour.

John: (*flatly*) Changing colour.

Madeleine: The mice and rats. They all, well...changed colour.

John: (*suspiciously*) In what way?

Madeleine: They...went green.

John: What?

Madeleine: Sorry.

John: Green?

Madeleine: Yes.

John: How green?

Madeleine: Oh, just...just very, very green.

John: So, wait - you're telling me that if I do this, it might not work, and I might change colour?

Madeleine: No, no. No, I'm not saying that. I'm saying it might not work, and you *will* change colour. No doubt about that. This stuff is voracious. Once it gets inside you it permeates your skin cells, your hair, your nails, your teeth...

John: Teeth?!

Madeleine: Everything. Trust me, you will go bright green.

John: Green teeth?

Madeleine: And you'll glow in the dark.

John: Oh, well that's just the icing on the cake. So you can even see I'm green when the bloody lights are off.

Madeleine: Look, I'm sorry this isn't quite the news you wanted to hear.

John: No, on the contrary, this is exactly the news I wanted to hear! I'm cock-a-bloody-hoop! Things couldn't be going better. I've just made a speech on national television telling the world that if it doesn't go green it will die, and now you're telling me that if I don't go green...I'm going to die?

Madeleine: There is a certain irony there, isn't there. But yes, I am afraid that you will go green, Mr...Brown.

John: You're enjoying this, aren't you?

Madeleine: Hardly.

John: No way, forget it. I know what this is. This is all about you.

Madeleine: Me?

John: You and your damn reputation...

Madeleine: (*talking over each other*) It's nothing to do with my...

John: ...and your damn tests, and your "oh, look at me, scientific colleagues, aren't I clever" article in the bloody medical journals. Well stuff that. No. Why am I the green guinea pig?

Madeleine: Well, you're the only choice.

John: What about the other two people – you said three of us had got this. Why can't they find out if it works first?

Madeleine: Because they're dead!

John: (*stopped in his tracks*) Oh.

Madeleine: And that's what you're going to be if you don't try it. This is not about me, Mr Brown. It's all about you.

A pause, as John takes in the information.

John: How long have I got?

Madeleine: A few months, maybe.

John: And the green...business. How long does that take?

Madeleine: Overnight.

John: I hate you.

Madeleine: Look, it would be unprofessional of me to raise your hopes too much. But for what it's worth, off the record, I'd be amazed if this didn't do for you exactly what it did for those rats.

John: Turned them into freaks?

Madeleine: Saved their lives.

John: Look, if it's all the same to you, I'm going to sleep on this.

Madeleine: Okay.

John: I do have that long, I take it?

Madeleine: Just about. (*Handing him a card*) Call me whenever you're ready. But please, give yourself a chance. The quicker we start the treatment...

John: The quicker I go green.

Madeleine: Sleep on it.

John exits. Madeleine watches him leave, thoughtfully.

Lights fade back to the interview area. Madeleine walks back to it and sits down.

Sir Clive: And did he?

Madeleine: Did he what?

Sir Clive: Sleep on it?

Madeleine: Oh, I doubt he slept much that night. Would you?

Sir Clive: No.

Madeleine: He went home. Presumably to chat it through...with his girlfriend.

Lights fade back to the central arena. We hear very loud and frantic disco music overlaid with a keep fit instructor's voice shouting out rhythmic instructions... "1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8, 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8...and knees, knees, left leg stretch, right leg stretch, arms, arms, shoulders back...(and so on)." Laura, wearing a tracksuit or leotard, is energetically following the instructions to maximum comic effect. John enters, sighs and spends the next minute or so trying not to get trodden on as Laura parades around the room. At one point, while standing to her side, he has to duck as she reacts to the instruction "and left arm...thrust!"

Laura: (*still dancing frantically and shouting over the loud music*) Hiya!

John: Hi.

Laura: Good day?

John: I've had better. Did you see my speech?

Laura: What?

John: Did you see my speech?

Laura: No. Was it on TV?

John: I told you it might be.

Laura: No, sorry, I've been catching up on my fitness DVDs. I'm a week behind.

John: You've got a weak behind?

Laura: No, I'm a week behind. On the course.

John: Oh.

Laura: What?

John: I said "Oh". Look can we turn this thing off?

Laura: Nearly done.

She continues her manic exercise for a short while, much to John's annoyance, until the lesson ends: "and thrust that pelvis...forward, back, and forward, back...and rest!" Laura stops the DVD with a remote.

Laura: Phew. I'm knackered. So, how was it?

John: What?

Laura: The speech.

John: (*taking off his jacket*) Well, I'm told it was very...

Laura: Uggh! What's that?

John has taken off his jacket. He is wearing a short-sleeved shirt, and Laura has spotted the tiny blob of cotton wool taped to his arm with a spot of blood on it.

John: Oh, er...they just did a bit of a routine medical check up at the conference today.

Laura: Shit, John - take it away. You know how I hate blood.

John: It's only a...

Laura: Just cover it up - I can feel my legs going funny already.

John: Well, sorry...

Laura: You don't want me to faint again, do you?

John: It was me who had the test.

Laura: You're being unfair, John, you know how that kind of thing freaks me out.

John: (*bad-temperedly shoving his jacket back on*) Better now?

Laura: You know sometimes you can be really insensitive.

John: What??

Laura: I'm going to go and have a shower, I've only got an hour to get ready.

John: Ready for what?

Laura: I'm going out with Jane tonight - I did tell you, didn't I?

John: No.

Laura: I'm sure I did.

John: I'm sure you didn't.

Laura: I'm sure you didn't listen.

John: I'm sure you didn't say it.

Laura: Look, John, I haven't got time to argue with you.

John: Really? You normally make time.

Laura: Bloody hell - we have had a bad day, haven't we? What's the matter? Didn't they like your precious speech?

John: Well actually...

Laura: Look, I haven't got time for petty politics, John, let's discuss it when you've calmed down.

She exits. John stands, fuming, then starts ranting to a long-gone Laura.

John: Oh, by the way - did I mention I was dying? Insensitive of me, I know. There might even be some blood. Anyway, if you could just pause your Keep Fit DVD long enough to bury me, I'd appreciate it.

He sighs, thinks, then produces Madeleine's business card from his pocket, and calls her. The spotlight cuts back to the interview area.

Sir Clive: I take it John and his girlfriend were not entirely seeing eye-to-eye.

Madeleine: Well, I'm probably a whisker biased but, no, I don't think they were made for each other. She was a pretty little thing, of course, and men are quite capable of forgiving pretty little things more readily than...no, sorry I'm about to become a terrible bitch - you don't want to hear all this.

Sir Clive: If we could just stick to the facts.

Madeleine: That is a fact, but moving on. Anyway, John rang me that night. *(Her mobile rings and she answers it, spot-lit, in a re-enactment)* Hello?

John: *(another spotlight on John)* It's John Brown.

Madeleine: Mr Brown - what can I do for you?

John: Can I come and see you?

Madeleine: Of course - when?

John: Now.

Madeleine: Oh...I'm sorry I'm...

John: Tomorrow morning, then.

Madeleine: I've got appointments all day, but I obviously do want to...

John: Tomorrow night, then. Don't make me wait any longer.

Madeleine: Yes...yes, of course - okay. Look, I need to get home for an hour or so, but I could meet you at the hospital tomorrow evening at, say...seven?

John: I'll be there.

Light fades on Madeleine. The doorbell rings. John exits to see who it is. Brian and Christine enter urgently, with John following in their wake.

Brian: I'm sorry, John, we just couldn't rest.

Christine: John, love - how are you? Brian says you're not at all well.

John: Er...okay, Christine, thanks. Look...

Christine: *(holding a casserole dish)* I've brought you some broth.

John: Broth?

Christine: Brian says that new girlfriend of yours doesn't look after you properly.

John: What?

Christine: *(putting the broth on a side-table)* Tea's never on the table when you walk in. You're wasting away. Where is she? I'll give her a piece of my mind.

Brian: Steady on, there's not much to go round.

John: No, really I'd rather you...

Christine: Out on the razzle, I suppose – leaving you to fend for yourself.

John: She's...in the shower.

Christine: Have you eaten, John?

John: Well...no.

Christine: See what I mean? You need something to build you up. Try this. It's full of goodness.

Brian: All right Christine, stop fussing over him.

Christine: Well it's true. Look at him. He's like a rake. You're not one of those vegetarians are you?

John: No.

Christine: Brian – stop eating his grapes.

Brian: Oh, right. These are for you.

Christine: What's left of them.

John: (*lifting up a severely ravaged bunch of grapes*) Thanks. This is...thoughtful of you both, but...

Brian: You've had us worried sick, John.

Laura: (*shouting from off-stage*) John? Have you seen my hair straighteners?

John: Er, no.

Laura: You must have moved them.

John: I haven't moved them. Why would I move them?

Laura: I left them by the side of the bed.

John: Then they're probably by the side of the bed.

Laura: They're not. Are they down there?

John: No.

Laura: If they're down there you're dead.

John: They're not.

Laura: I'm coming down to take a look.

John: Shit. Brian, Christine...quickly, I need your help.

Christine: To look for the hair straighteners?

John: No, no, something else.

Brian: Name it, John – that's why we're here.

John: Look...no time to explain, but this hospital thing. The illness. Laura doesn't know anything about yet. I'd be grateful if you didn't mention it.

Brian: Doesn't know about it?

John: I need to deal with this in my own way, Brian. Please.

Brian: Your call.

Laura enters, dressed up but with a towel on her hair.

John: Ah, can I introduce...

Laura: You could have said we had guests.

John: This is Brian - party chairman Brian. And his wife, Christine.

Laura: Hello.

Brian: Pleasure.

Laura: Hair straighteners.

John: Right. I'll go and have a man-look, shall I? Won't be a second. You three just, you know...mingle.

Laura: (*searching for hair straighteners*) Sorry to be rude, but I'm running late. Girly night out.

Brian: That's all right. Christine and I were just passing.

Laura immediately alights on the broth and stares at it quizzically.

Christine: And we thought we'd bring him some broth.

Laura: As you do.

John enters with hair straighteners.

John: Hair straighteners.

Laura: Where were they?

John: By the side of the bed.

Laura: No they weren't. I looked.

John: Did you look under the towel?

Laura: You put a towel over them?

John: No, you put a towel over them.

Laura: My towel was on the bed.

John: Until it fell off.

Laura: Oh, so that'll be my fault again, then.

John: No, I'm happy to take full responsibility for what happens to your towel after you've had a shower. That's only fair.

Laura: (*drying her hair with the towel*) I really haven't got time for this, John.

She dumps her hair towel in his hands and exits.

Brian and Christine have been witnessing the bickering with wide-eyed incredulity.

John: That was Laura.

Christine: She needs a good slap.

Brian: I'm saying nothing.

John: You didn't mention...

Brian: No.

John: Thanks.

Brian: Look – whatever this problem is, John, you don't want to be facing it alone.

Christine: A trouble shared is a trouble halved, John.

John: I appreciate your concerns, honestly, but – well for now I need to work this out myself. If that's okay.

Brian: Suit yourself.

John: Thanks for the broth, Christine. It looks...splendid.

Christine: Any time. It'll need warming up.

John: Yes. And...well, you may as well finish the grapes, Brian.

He hands back the bunch to Brian.

Brian: Christine love, go and wait in the car. Man-talk.

Christine tuts and exits.

Brian: All right, John, what's going on?

John: Brian, not now.

Brian: I thought we were friends.

John: I'm not in the mood for this.

Brian: That girl's not right for you.

John: Mind your own business.

Brian: Anything that affects the party is my business.

John: This has nothing to do with the par...

Brian: Anything that affects the future party leader is my business.

John: I'm not going to be party leader – I thought I'd made that perfectly clear.

Brian: Is that your decision or hers?

Brian: What?

Brian: She's too headstrong.

John: And you're not?

Brian: She's too...

John: ...female?

Brian: I'm just offering well-intentioned advice, John. Man-to-man.

John: Goodnight, Brian.

Brian defiantly eats a grape and exits. Lights cross-fade back to the interview area.

Madeleine: So I arranged to meet John at the hospital the following evening. I was assuming he wanted to talk about starting the treatment.

Sir Clive: But?

Madeleine: Well, he had another question first.

Lights cross-fade back to the central arena, where John is waiting. Madeleine walks into the scene.

John: So...what do I tell my girlfriend?

Madeleine: Look, I know none of this is easy. You'll just have to explain that it's the only treatment we have, and...

John: But she doesn't even know I'm ill.

Madeleine: What?

John: She's not very good at that kind of thing. She's highly strung. She wouldn't cope. I know she wouldn't. I can't tell her.

Madeleine: Do you want me to tell her?

John: What? No! That's not what I meant. Look – you're a woman...

Madeleine: Yes, we've established that.

John: So, what's the best way to handle it? Okay, I accept I've got to tell her, but...well is there some way I can tell her, without her...really...knowing? Do you know what I mean?

Madeleine: No.

John: Perhaps I could half tell her. Leave out the bad bits.

Madeleine: Which are the good bits?

John: You're not helping.

Madeleine: Mr Brown. I'm not a relationship counsellor, but she has to know. (*John looks unconvinced*) Look, either this treatment works, and you go green, or you die. Either way, your girlfriend is going to notice a slight change in you.

John: I'm not so sure she would.

Madeleine: What?

John: Nothing. Look, I know this might sound crazy, but I'm still not a hundred percent certain I want to do this.

Madeleine: I can understand that.

John: Can you?

Madeleine: Yes. Of course. Because you can imagine waking up tomorrow and being green. It's tangible, and it's not nice. And you think - why would I do that to myself?

John: Well, I know why I should.

Madeleine: But you don't. Not really. I mean only in theory. You've just taken my word for it. So yes, you can easily imagine what it might be like to be green. And it's not a great prospect. But, what you can't possibly imagine...(*she falters and turns away*)

John: Go on.

Madeleine: What you can't imagine, is...how ill you're going to feel. Because it's not real. It hasn't happened yet. But I'm afraid it will. And once it does, well, then it may be too late.

John: You know, I like coming to see you. You always manage to cheer me up.

Madeleine: (*offering the bottle*) Take it with you.

John: What?

Madeleine: Take it. If you decide to go ahead, just...knock it back.

John: Knock it back.

Madeleine: There's plenty more where that came from. I produce it in my lab.

John: You have a lab?

Madeleine: Yes, I have a lab.

John: And a white coat?

Madeleine: Actually I have a green coat – doesn't show the stains.

John: Was that a joke?

Madeleine: An attempt.

John: So, you make this stuff?

Madeleine: I don't make it, I cultivate it.

John: What's that mean – you take it to the opera?

Madeleine: Like I said, it's a naturally-occurring fungus. It normally grows on trees.

John: Unlike money.

Madeleine: Far more valuable than money. To you, anyway.

John: So, when you say knock it back...

Madeleine: Drink it. It's too goeey for a syringe, I'm afraid. I have put it through the blender a few times, but it's still a bit, you know...chewy.

John: What does it taste like?

Madeleine: Ah.

John: This is going to be more bad news, isn't it.

Madeleine: How can I explain it. Erm...ever had a Smoothie?

John: (*encouraged*) Yes. I love Smoothies.

Madeleine: Well, think of this as...a Roughie.

John: That bad, eh?

Madeleine: I'd suggest you knock it back, then quickly drink something you like the taste of – like a Smoothie.

John: Are you saying I should learn to take the Roughie with the Smoothie?

Madeleine: A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down.

John: Come on – how bad is it?

Madeleine: Well, let's be honest, it's not going to be the best thing you've ever tasted, is it.

John: Be more specific.

Madeleine: Well, I'd imagine it tastes like...well, what you'd imagine bioluminescent green fungus tastes like.

John: Imagine?

Madeleine: Yes.

John: So you haven't tried it?

Madeleine: Do I look green?

John: Not even a tiny little nibble?

Madeleine: Do I look green?

John: Is it that vicious?

Madeleine: Yes. That's what makes it so effective.

John: Any complaints from the rats?

Madeleine: Rats eat trash, maggots, rotting flesh and dung, Mr Brown.

John: Right.

Madeleine: But they wouldn't touch this stuff. I had to force feed it to them.

John: (*walking out*) It's been a total joy once again, doc.

Madeleine: And I suppose I should let you know, I'm not a doctor.

John: (*turning, stunned*) What?

Madeleine: I'm not a doctor.

John: But you said you were a medical professional.

Madeleine: Yes.

John: The leading expert on this disease.

Madeleine: I am.

John: So...what are you - a scientist?

Madeleine: (*uncomfortable, with a shrug*) Not exactly.

John: You have a lab.

Madeleine: That doesn't make me a scientist.

John: So what does it make you?

Madeleine: A...lady with a lab.

John: You're not a politician are you?

Madeleine: No, why?

John: Because I'm finding it very hard to get a straight answer from you. So. One last chance, Madeleine Gascoigne. What are you?

Madeleine: (*reluctantly*) A vet.

John: Oh, magnificent. You've really saved the best till last haven't you. I get the world's rarest and most lethal disease and what happens? I get taken to the vets.

Madeleine: This disease started in animals, Mr Brown.

John: What are you going to do - keep me overnight in a cage? (*He slams the bottle on a table and starts rifling through his pockets*) Here...better check my Pet Plan insurance.

Madeleine: Look, I know you're upset, but I...

John: Upset? Upset? Right now I'm facing a choice between premature death and an overnight transformation into Kermit the sodding frog, and the best the NHS can come up with is...Doctor Doolittle's wife!

Madeleine: (*incensed, she suddenly lets rip with an impressively passionate rant*)

Okay that's enough! This may not be ideal for you, Mr Frog, but I've worked bloody hard trying to beat this wretched disease when everyone else just didn't want to know. Night after night when all the other doctors were tucked up in bed I was in my lab testing, and re-testing, till my eyes were stinging and my head was swimming - going to bed with hope, waking up with despair, starting all over again - new theories, new tests, new hope, new despair. On and on and on for five, long, hard, thankless years and frankly, it kicked the stuffing out of me. This disease was making me ill, and I hadn't even got it. But there's no way this bastard was going to beat me. And it's taken discipline and patience and dedication and more guts than I knew I had and yes,

a huge dollop of luck, but you know what? I think I'm finally on to something really worthwhile. And I may be just a vet, and I may be just a woman, but right now I'm all you've got. So why don't you just show a little more respect!

A long pause. John is in open-mouthed awe of Madeleine's outburst. She is instantly embarrassed by it and turns away.

John: Wow.

Madeleine: I'm so sorry.

John: No, I'm sorry.

Madeleine: No, I'm sorry. That was...ridiculously unprofessional. Even for a vet. Please, forgive me.

John: No need.

Madeleine: Every need.

John: No.

Laura: Yes.

John: No, really.

Madeleine: Yes, really.

John: Well, let's just agree to disagree.

Madeleine: Agreed.

John: That was...quite a speech.

Madeleine: I'm passionate about what I do.

John: Clearly. So what got you into all this?

Madeleine: My husband.

John: Oh. Is he a doctor?

Madeleine: A patient.

John: What?

Madeleine: He was the first person to die of this disease.

John: Shit. I'm sorry.

Madeleine: There was absolutely nothing they could do for him. Clueless. They just all stood around shrugging their shoulders. I vowed there and then that one day I would learn how to beat this.

John: Oh, dear God.

Madeleine: (*fighting back tears*) I loved my husband, Mr Brown. And if I could have kept him alive for even another day by turning him...green, or blue, or purple or stripey orange, I would have done it in a heartbeat.

John: Look, all that stuff I said yesterday, about you doing this for your reputation... well, I feel a complete arse.

Madeleine: Good. Now it's personal. So, don't you dare die on me, Mr Brown.

John: I'll try my best.

Madeleine: I wish we could have met under less stressful circumstances. (*Offering a handshake*) You seem like a fun guy.

John: Yeah, well. *(He picks up the bottle and talks to it)* This seems like a fungi too. See ya.

They shake hands and he exits. Madeleine returns to Sir Clive as the lights cross-fade.

Madeleine: So, it was back home, for another heart to heart...with girlfriend.

Back to the central area. Laura is sat in the semi-darkness watching an off-stage TV. A blue light flickers on her face, and there's a movie soundtrack in the background. John enters.

Laura: Hiya.

John: Hi.

Laura: Where've you been?

John: Out. You?

Laura: In.

John: I'm sorry about yesterday.

There's no answer. Laura is gripped by the TV.

John: What are you watching?

Laura: The invaders.

John: Oh. Who's invading?

Laura: Alien spores came in on a shuttle. They get into the blood stream. Everybody's turning into aliens.

John: Oh. *(He goes to pour himself a drink, and turns pensively)* I went to the hospital.

Laura: Oh, you are kidding me!

John: No, I had an appointment with...

Laura: Do not open that door...do not open that door!

John sighs and turns back to pour his drink. Laura shrieks, causing him to spill some.

John: What?

Laura: She opened the door. Why would you do that? Just run you idiot. Run!

John: Look, Laura, I had to go to hospital because...

Laura: I knew it! I saw that one coming. He's got it now!

John: Who?

Laura: Nicole Kidman's husband. He's infected. It's only a matter of time.

John: I know the feeling.

Laura: What?

John: Nothing.

Laura: He's going to turn into an alien now. It happens when they're asleep.

John: What does?

Laura: The transformation. They go to bed human, and wake up as an alien.

John: Laura...

Laura: Oh, my God! Don't go in the lift... Quick! Press the damn button.

John, resigned to being ignored, sighs and drinks his drink. Laura gets increasingly agitated and ends up behind the sofa, totally freaking.

Laura: Shoot him! He is not your husband! Just shoot the bugger! *(There's a gunshot)*
Yes!!! *(Emerging from behind the sofa calmly)* Well, I'm off to bed.

John: What? What about the film?

Laura: That's pretty much it. Guy in the helicopter finds an antidote, virus dies, they all get better now.

John: How do you know?

Laura: Seen it before. Anyway, I'm exhausted. Early start tomorrow. *(She turns at the door and offers a conciliatory gesture)* Coming?

John: I'll just finish my drink.

Laura: Okay - night then.

John: Night.

Laura exits. John grabs the TV remote and channel hops. We hear the last part of his speech on the TV news, followed by cheering. He watches, intrigued. Then we hear a TV reporter.

Reporter: "And as you could hear from the reaction there, John Brown is fast becoming very much the darling of the party - a party that's currently flying up the ratings. In fact, they've gained no less than two percentage points every month during the last four months - quite an astonishing performance, and due some feel in no small measure to this man's popularity with voters. So much so, that some commentators are even tipping him not just to lead the party, but as a future Prime Minister. A Green Prime Minister? Well, you wouldn't put your house on it, but let's face it, stranger things have happened in politics. This is Nick Robertson, BBC News, at the Green Party Conference."

John switches off the TV and stares intently into space, deep in thought, underpinned by a dramatic drone of music. He takes the bottle from his pocket, removes the top and tries to pluck up courage to drink it, but stops short, wincing at the smell. He replaces the top and makes a call on his mobile.

John: Brian, it's John.

A spotlight picks up Brian on the other end of the call.

Brian: John! I've been worried sick. How are you?

John: Okay. I'm okay.

Brian: I would have rung, but...

John: No, that's fine. Look, Brian, can I come and see you?

Brian: Of course.

John: Tomorrow morning?

Brian: Er...yes. Tomorrow's fine. We could meet at HQ.

John: Er, no. I'd prefer somewhere more private.

Brian: Oh, okay. How about my club?

John: How about your house?

Brian: All right.

John: I'll be there at eleven. Oh...Brian, look - I know we've joked in the past about your sexist attitudes...

Brian: I am not sexist!

John: Well, some people say you are...

Brian: Yes, and if you notice they're all women. What does that tell you?

John: Er...anyway, be that as it may. Look Brian - serious question. Would you ever discriminate against someone just because of the colour of their skin?

Brian: Course not. Why?

John: Oh, I'll explain tomorrow. Goodnight, Brian.

John ends the call and exits, leaving Brian slightly bewildered. Brian's wife enters carrying a whiskey and hands it to him.

Christine: Who was that?

Brian: John.

Christine: Golly - how is he?

Brian: He seemed okay...I think. A little bit chirpier. He wants to come and see me tomorrow.

Christine: Did he mention his illness?

Brian: No.

Christine: Oh, I hope he's okay.

Brian: Christine, I know I'm a bit of an old-fashioned politician, but...I'm not a racist am I?

Christine: Racist?

Brian: John's just asked me.

Christine: What the hell for?

Brian: Dunno.

Christine: You haven't upset anyone, have you?

Brian: No.

Christine: Perhaps he's got someone in mind for the party. Ethnic minority candidate perhaps.

Brian: Perhaps.

Christine: That wouldn't be a problem would it?

Brian: Course not. Diversity's the big buzz word these days.

Christine: Well, you're many things, my dear, but you're no racist.

She goes to leave.

Brian: Mmm. What about sexist?

Christine: *(pause for thought)* I'd better get on with the washing up.

She exits. Lights fade and Brian exits. Lights back up on John, once again staring intently at the bottle underpinned by the ominous drone of music. Breaking the tension, Laura enters wearing her dressing gown and cleaning her teeth. The drone cuts, John hides the bottle.

Laura: John.

John: Mmm?

Laura: You okay?

John: Yeah, fine. Why?

Laura: Promise me something.

John: What?

Laura: That you won't turn into an alien in the night.

John: I'll try not to.

She exits. The ominous music returns, as the lights narrow to a eerie spotlight on John. He lifts the green glowing bottle in front of his face.

John: No promises, though.

He removes the cap, holds his nose and instantly swigs off the liquid. He trembles. His eyes widen. The ominous drone builds to a dramatic crescendo and then cuts.

Blackout.

End of Act One.